

SIMMONS (J. E.)

ADDRESS

DELIVERED AT

THE COMMENCEMENT

OF

THE NORMAL COLLEGE

OF

THE CITY OF NEW YORK,

JUNE 30TH, 1887

BY

J. EDWARD SIMMONS, LL.D.,

PRESIDENT OF THE BOARD OF EDUCATION.

PUBLISHED BY ORDER OF THE BOARD.



NEW YORK :  
HALL OF THE BOARD OF EDUCATION,  
146 GRAND STREET, COR. OF ELM.

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PRESS OF DE LEEUW, OPPENHEIMER & MYERS, NEW YORK.

MR. PRESIDENT, LADIES AND GENTLEMEN :

IT is with some hesitation that I yield to the courteous invitation of the President of the Normal College to address you before the interesting exercises of this occasion are closed. I hesitate, because I am reluctant to tax the attention of this vast assemblage, whose interest in this institution and whose enjoyment of these Commencement exercises have induced them to endure long and patiently the heat and discomfort of this beautiful summer day. But, occupying the office with which I have been honored, as the executive head of the system of popular education in the City of New York, perhaps I may be pardoned if I trespass upon your patience for a few moments, and pay my tribute to the young ladies of the Graduating Class, who have acquitted themselves with so much honor, and who have afforded us all so charming an intellectual entertainment ; and say to them, as their well earned plaudit, “ WELL DONE—WELL DONE ! Your work is approved.”

To the loving parents who throng this spacious hall, and to the friends of this institution who believe in its mission and rejoice in its prosperity, let me say : “ Behold the People’s College—the grand triumph of popular education ; the consummation of an earnest effort to place the female portion of our community on a higher moral, social and intellectual plane.”

A system of popular education, in one form or another, has been in existence for many centuries; but the system of free schools for the people received its greatest impetus in Germany, in the year 1524. In this country, popular education was born with the nation. It is the great foundation stone of the Republic; the only foundation on which to erect the structure of an enduring civilization. I speak this as a civilian; and at the same time I bow with reverent head before the shrine of a lofty religious faith which shall ennoble and sanctify all purely intellectual achievements. The intellectual training of the people must become, and must always be, an incalculable factor in the welfare of the state. Acting on this principle, the Dutch founders of New York, then called New Amsterdam, soon after their arrival here from Holland, made liberal appropriations for the establishment of schools for the people, some of which are in existence to-day, claiming to be the lineal descendants of those established under Van Twiller in 1633.

The early settlers of New England, when they left their native land in search of a place where they could enjoy civil and religious liberty, were thoroughly imbued with this idea—that the State should educate its children; and as soon as they had covered their heads with roofs they built the schoolhouse and appointed the schoolmaster. As far back as 1665, Massachusetts made the boast that in every town in the colony there was a schoolhouse, and in every village of over one hundred families there was a grammar school. In 1700 the colony of Connecticut passed a law

inflicting a penalty on the selectmen of every town who should fail to keep running, for three months consecutively in every year, a public school. New Hampshire and Vermont followed the example set by Massachusetts and Connecticut, and established schools in every hamlet where the number of inhabitants and of pupils was sufficient to employ and support a teacher.

Six years after the settlement of the city of Boston, an appropriation of \$2,000 was made as part of a fund for the establishment of a college. It was a small but consecrated corner-stone. Around and over it, as the years have passed, have been reared the walls of a noble and lofty institution ; and the influences of Harvard College have permeated the nation, and her illustrious children have poured light upon the world. The common school system of this country is of New England origin ; and of those sturdy Pilgrim Fathers, Froude might have said, as he said of the Scotch : “ With them education was a passion.”

Throughout democratic New England, in the early days of the nation, the spelling-book was widely circulated and the printing press was kept actively employed ; while in aristocratic Virginia, Sir William Berkeley, the royal Colonial Governor, in 1685, made the declaration : “ I thank God there are no free schools or printing presses in the colony of Virginia, and I hope there never will be.” Two centuries have passed since Sir William entered his protest against the free school system, and yet it still lives, and is disseminating knowledge throughout every civilized coun-

try of the globe. The contrasted policy of Massachusetts and Virginia two centuries ago, reveals the genesis of the wide difference between them to-day. Massachusetts, with its 8,315 square miles of territory, has increased its population to 1,783,085 ; while old Virginia, with 67,230 square miles, has a population of 2,130,622, only 347,537 more than Massachusetts. (In this I include, of course, the new State of West Virginia.) Massachusetts has a hard, sterile, rock-ribbed soil ; Virginia has its broad plains, its fertile lands, its vast deposits of coal and iron, its golden veins and rich alluvium, covering an area eight times as large as her New England sister. Yet, we find that the valuation of the wealth of Massachusetts, according to the latest estimates, is \$2,795,000,000, while that of the Virginias combined is \$1,000,000,000. By the census of 1880 it appears that of persons of ten years of age and upwards, in Massachusetts, who cannot read, the percentage is 5.3 ; of those who cannot write, 6.5 per cent. In Virginia, 34 per cent. cannot read ; in West Virginia, 12 per cent. In Virginia, 40 per cent. cannot write, and in West Virginia, the ratio is 12 per cent.

Is there not an inexorable logic in the social, moral and intellectual condition of these States, which demonstrates the law of divergence out of which these differences have sprung ? Democracy is ever seeking the elevation of the people by the general dissemination of knowledge, while aristocracy is ever striving to keep the people in darkness and ignorance ; and by restricting education to the few,

it seeks to build up and perpetuate a privileged class. In this country there is no such thing as a real aristocracy. "All men are created free and equal," is our political creed. "There is among us no horizontal stratification of society, like the rocks in the earth, that holds one class down below forevermore, and lets another class come to the surface and there remain for ever. Our political and social organization is rather like the ocean, where each individual drop is free to move; and from the lowest depths of the mighty deep any drop may come up and glitter on the crest of the highest wave that rolls."

Educate man and his shackles fall. Free education will overcome every obstacle in the pathway of a true democracy. While the American, during his lifetime, is generally mindful of the cause of education, he does not forget to make liberal provision in his will for the establishment and the maintenance of schools and colleges. America is the richest country in the world, but the English aristocracy is the richest *class* in the world. But who has ever heard of an English nobleman making any liberal endowment for educational purposes, or for any other purpose beneficial to the people, unless we except the late Lord Shaftesbury, whose life and wealth were given to humanity? The policy of an aristocracy is to build up the family name, and to let the general government make such provision for the people as it may deem best. With us, the rich, many of them, take pleasure in providing for the education of the poor; and we ought never to cease to hold

in grateful remembrance the founder of Johns Hopkins University, Vanderbilt University, Vassar College, Cornell University, George Peabody College, Girard College, Stevens' Institute, Paeker Institute, Cooper Institute, and the founder of that great university in California, Leland Stanford, who has donated seven million dollars that the young men of the Pacific slope may drink at the life-giving fountain of knowledge. Long after the granite shaft that marks the grave of SAMUEL J. TILDEN shall have crumbled into dust, the library which is soon to be established in this city by the Trustees of his estate will keep bright the memory and perpetuate the fame of the greatest statesman of his day and generation.

No government has ever made such liberal endowments for educational purposes as those made by the government of the United States. But the federal government takes no part in the education of the people. That is the duty of the several States and Territories; and a system of free education is now in successful operation in every State and Territory of our Union. Soon after the Revolutionary War, in 1787, Congress passed an act appropriating for educational purposes the sixteenth section of the land of every township in every Territory, and when these Territories were admitted as States, they came into the Union with splendid educational endowments. The total amount of land thus granted by the National Government has reached the magnificent figure of seventy-eight million acres—an area greater than that of England, Scotland and

Ireland combined. More money is spent in the United States for popular education than by any other nation in the world, and hence the percentage of illiteracy, pauperism and crime is lower in this country than in any other. In the year 1885, Germany, with all her great universities and boasted civilization, spent for the education of her people forty millions of dollars ; England, thirty-five millions ; France, fifteen millions ; Austria, nine millions ; and Russia, a paltry *five* millions for the maintenance of her schools, and one hundred and sixty-five millions for the maintenance of her army ! Is it any wonder, then, that the people of Russia, ground under the heel of a despotic system and held in darkness and ignorance, should seek to release themselves from the tyranny under which they suffer, by resorting to methods of warfare which are brutal and terrible, but generated by the impassioned desire of down-trodden men for liberty, civilization and progress ?

High up, and above all, on this grand record of educational expenditure by the great nations of the world, stands the United States of America, with the superb figure of over one hundred million dollars devoted in the year 1885 to the education of the people ! “ Let the soldier be abroad if he will ; he can do nothing in this age,” said Lord Brougham, “ the school-master is abroad ; and I will trust him, armed with his Primer, against the soldier in full military array.” The plodding and practical utilitarian, whose vision is bounded by the narrow circle of his own interests, may ask, What are the results of this grand system of pop-

ular education ? And I point with pride to this vast community, composed of a peaceful, happy and prosperous people. We are a peaceful, happy and prosperous people because we are an *educated* people. That we are an educated people is proven by the fact that the percentage of illiteracy is lower here than anywhere else ; that one-half of all the newspapers of the world are published in America ; that we spend more money for books and magazines than any other nation ; that our public libraries contain forty-five million books, twelve million more than are gathered in all the public libraries of Europe combined.

Right here, in the city of New York, at our very doors, we have the largest, and in my opinion the best, system of popular education under one municipal government in the world ; and in order that you may form some idea of the magnitude of this system, I will give you a few of its leading features. We have one hundred and thirty-four school buildings in which there are about three hundred schools. In some of these buildings we can accommodate *three thousand children*. These school buildings, including the yards, cover an area of thirty-five acres of land. If they could be placed side by side they would extend over two miles. They would form one side of the Fifth Avenue, from Eighth street to Sixth-third street. We employ in our schools of all classes about four thousand teachers ; thirty-five hundred females and five hundred males. We educate about three hundred thousand children annually, with an average daily attendance of one

hundred and fifty-three thousand. The annual cost of maintaining the public schools of this city is about four million dollars. Some people object, and say that this is too much money to spend for educational purposes. But it is fair to presume that they are not familiar with the grand work in which we are engaged. The per capita cost, in 1885, of educating a child in a grammar school, was \$29.40, and in a primary school \$15.10, which is less than ever before since the establishment of the system. We have a system of compulsory education. Under the law, passed in 1874, all children between eight and fourteen years of age are compelled to go to school fourteen weeks in every year. We try to enforce this law, and last year our officers made 27,000 visits to the homes of truant children. The criminal classes are largely recruited from the waifs and Arabs who float about our streets. Since the passage of this law, the police records show a most gratifying decrease in juvenile crime, of pauperism and of illiteracy. It costs the city \$29.40 per annum to educate a child in a grammar school, and it costs \$110 per annum to maintain a criminal in the penitentiary.

*Four-fifths of all our criminals are uneducated.* Wher-  
ever you find in this country the maximum of wealth, you  
find also the minimum of illiteracy ; and, therefore, the  
wisest statesmen have concluded that the best way to  
diminish the crime and decrease the pauperism of a com-  
munity is to minimize its ignorance. In other words, the  
education of the people is an important power in the politi-

cal economy of a nation. To broaden the intelligence and to form the moral character of a people is to develop the mental and social powers which shall contribute to its material prosperity and grandeur. It is a prime factor in the science of political economy, that, looking back to first principles, there can be no general accumulation of wealth without labor—in which I comprehend all the diversified pursuits of civilized men, whether manual, mental, or social. The sound mind directs the hand, whether that hand holds a plough, a pen, or a sceptre; and the importance of training men and women to usefulness and self-reliance cannot be over-estimated. In that direction, a recent movement has been made to engraft upon the system of popular education, in many cities in Europe and America, what is known as Manual Training. It is an interesting and growing subject of thought, experiment and expenditure. The Board of Education has it now under advisement, and it will be fairly examined and carefully weighed before any action shall be taken. I am not yet prepared to commit myself to its adoption as a feature of our system, with the expenditure required for a vast metropolis in which so many scores of thousands are taught. Perhaps it might be well to try it, as an experiment, in one or two schools; but I question the wisdom of engrafting it on our course of study until its usefulness, as a feature of our system, has been thoroughly demonstrated:

I cannot omit to make mention of our beautiful Nautical School, the St. Mary's, designed to train young men

to win honor and perform service as future sailors, navigators and explorers. This school-ship is loaned to the City of New York, while its expenses are paid out of our school fund. It seems to me that it has now so far demonstrated its character and value, that the time has come when its full capacity should be enjoyed by other than the pupils enrolled from the City of New York. The vessel is the property of the people of the United States. Applications come to us from non-residents of our own State, and from earnest and well-qualified young men from other States, for admission to the school. But, by the law, we are compelled to haul in the gang-plank, lean over the taffrail, and tell them: "You cannot come on board this ship!" I think it will be in order for the Board of Education to consider this matter, and make provision, by law, that pupils from other localities may be admitted to the school by paying the per capita cost of expenses for the two years of their course of study under the Nation's flag.

But I fear I have already consumed too much time, and must pass on to speak of the institution within whose walls we are assembled.

The NORMAL COLLEGE was established in 1870, for the purpose of furnishing the schools of New York with thoroughly trained and competent teachers. We employ in the two departments of the College about sixty-seven professors and teachers. We have on register nearly twenty-eight hundred students, with an average daily

attendance of about twenty-five hundred. The cost of maintaining this College, including supplies and appliances of all kinds, is \$110,000 per annum. The per capita cost per annum of educating a young lady at this splendid institution is the comparatively insignificant sum of \$44. The efficiency of the school system depends largely on the efficiency of the work done in this College. The results achieved are far-reaching and salutary, and the reason why our schools are so uniformly excellent in discipline and instruction, lies in the superior character of the teachers—most of whom are graduates of this College. It is alleged by those not friendly to this Institution, that the object for which it was established has not been reached, in so far that comparatively few of the young ladies who graduate here ever succeed in getting employment in the public schools of our city. This statement is either a wilful misrepresentation, or it emanates from those who are too indolent, or too ignorant, to familiarize themselves with the facts. Let *us* examine the figures, and satisfy ourselves as to the accuracy or inaccuracy of the statement.

Since the foundation of this College, in 1870, we have graduated 3,479 young ladies, and the whole number of graduates appointed as teachers in the schools of New York is *two thousand eight hundred*, a little more than *eighty per cent*. The average number of graduates per year since 1882, is 245; the average number per year appointed as teachers in the schools of New York, 193. There are to-day about *seventeen hundred* graduates of this

College teaching in the schools of this city. "But what has become of the other eleven hundred?" asks my critical friend and tax-payer from the Fifth avenue. In reply, I answer that most of them are married, and are exercising the lovely influence which an educated mother always exerts over the children of her household. *Has the object for which this College was created been accomplished?* With the facts before you, I need not anticipate your answer.

From the beginning, Dr. THOMAS HUNTER has stood at the head of this institution. He has watched it by night and by day with paternal vigilance. Ever eager to avail himself of every opportunity to advance its welfare, he has, with alertness and skill, guided it with safety through many trials, and has shielded it from many threatened attacks. By his energy, by his aptitude as an instructor, by his systematic methods and discipline, he has made this institution thoroughly useful and practical in all its departments, and to-day it stands forth a brilliant star in the educational firmament of the world—an honor and a blessing to the City, the State and the Nation. May the voice of its President long be heard in this College, commanding respectful submission to official authority; and oft times, in the far distant future, may it strike sweet chords on the lyre of memory, and waken in the hearts of those who leave us to-day tender recollections of a great conservator of the common school system of New York—one who has given his life to the cause of popular education.

With all the sweet blessings that flow from this exalted seat of learning, there are those who do not approve its mission, and who seek to curtail its influence and circumscribe its usefulness. Its work has been, and may be again, temporarily embarrassed, but its permanency can never be seriously jeopardized, for its foundation stone rests upon the hearts of the people of New York. It was demanded by the development and progress of the times. It was the logical and inevitable outgrowth of the system—to provide teachers for the hundreds of thousands of the children of this city. Without the Normal College, from which to supply our army of qualified teachers, the school system of New York would be well nigh bankrupt to-day. Instead of retrenchment, we need enlargement. Instead of retrogression, we need progress; and I believe the time has come when the Normal College should be placed upon a basis similar to that of the College of the City of New York—beyond the reach of scheming demagogues and capricious politicians.

And now, YOUNG LADIES OF THE GRADUATING CLASS, a parting word to you, and I close.

The hour has at last arrived when the daily relations between you and this College must be terminated. You have doubtless looked forward to this period as one which would relieve you of responsibility and labor; as one of the events of your life—a triumph won, a higher level reached in your path to womanhood. I cannot doubt that this day brings to you mingled feelings of pleasure

and sorrow. Gratified as you must be with the contemplation of a long and profitable work accomplished, the severance of loved associations, and the parting with friends and teachers with whom you have been so delightfully connected during the past four years, surely must tinge this hour with a shade of sadness and regret. You are now to enter the great battle of life, and to apply, in varied duties and spheres of action, the knowledge and the principles which you have acquired during your course in this College. The responsibilities of a woman are weighty —those of a well-educated woman are multiplied manifold. Success in life does not consist of glitter, tinsel and show. It is in the best use of the best opportunities you have enjoyed. Your success in life will depend in a great measure on the use of the advantages that a cultured mind should always give its possessor.

To those who are to seek opportunities for employment the doors are opening wide, and new avenues for the labor of educated women are increasing in which to achieve success and reward. Be industrious; be honest; be true and useful women, and try to ornament the sphere in which God may place you. To those whose social surroundings relieve them from the necessity of self-support, let me commend the example and blessed reward of those angels of mercy who seek to cheer the hearts and alleviate the sufferings of less favored sisters, and who scatter roses in the thorny path of the lowly and the sad.

To all of you let me commend as an alliterative sentiment

for your remembrance of this occasion, the words : **CHARACTER—CULTURE—CONSECRATION.** **CHARACTER**, because it is the inestimable possession which makes human life in all its relations, a sphere of honor, usefulness and desire ; **CULTURE**, because it makes the virtues of a pure and noble character radiant with the power of a cultivated mind ; **CONSECRATION**, because it is the jeweled and imperial setting, which takes even the rough and indurated things of earth, and polishing them with patient and loving labor, makes them priceless with the light of immortality.

Accept the best wishes, as you share in the best affections of my heart. May all your undertakings be cheered with the joys of health and happiness, and may your names forever stand on the long roll of the *Alumnae* of this College, honored witnesses of the fame and glory of your **Alma Mater**.

IN BOARD OF EDUCATION.

JULY 13TH, 1887.

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Commissioner Wood offered the following :

RESOLVED—*That President SIMMONS be requested to furnish the Board with a copy of the address delivered by him at the Normal College Commencement, on 30th June, 1887, and that copies of the same be printed for distribution.*

Adopted.









